




# Ten things that make Andrew Jackson a fascinating man

I've been doing some research on the most important Tennessean ever, that being Andrew Jackson. And in the process of explaining his life to eighth graders, I've come up with the following list.

With apologies to David Letterman, here are ten things that make Andrew Jackson a fascinating person:

1. No one knows exactly where Andrew Jackson was born. We know he was born in an area known as the Waxhaws, along the border between North and South Carolina. But no one is certain which of those two states can rightfully claim the event. Regardless of where he was born, however, he soon corrected the mistake and moved to Tennessee.
2. Jackson's father died before he was born, and his mother and two brothers died before he was fourteen. So he had to take care of himself at a very early age, which may have had something to do with why he became such a tough young man.
3. Young Andrew Jackson wasn't exactly well behaved. When he was in his early twenties he was apprenticed to a lawyer in Salisbury, North Carolina. He developed such a reputation for wildness that the citizens of that town were happy to see him leave.
4. Andrew Jackson wasn't Rachel Jackson's first husband. When she was 17, she married a man named Lewis Robards. But in 1790 Robards left her, and a few months later she heard he had been granted a divorce from her. Andrew Jackson and Rachel were married the next year. But after two years of living together as man and wife, Andrew and Rachel learned that Robards had never actually been granted a divorce. Later, Lewis Robards was granted a divorce from Rachel, and Andrew and Rachel were married again (this time legally) in 1794.  
What this meant is that Andrew and Rachel were actually living as husband and wife before they legally were husband and wife. This unintended error haunted Andrew Jackson for the rest of his life.
5. Jackson held a dim view of Native Americans in general but could be kind to them individually. During the campaign against the Creeks in 1813, his army destroyed a Creek town and killed most of the warriors that they found there. But after the carnage General Jackson found an orphaned Creek, took pity on him and adopted him.
6. Two of the most important people in Tennessee history were Andrew Jackson and John Sevier. Naturally, they couldn't stand one another. No one is certain as to the origins of the feud, but at one point Sevier traded insults with Jackson in the streets of Knoxville. "I know of no great service you rendered the country, except taking a trip to Natchez with another man's wife," Sevier reportedly said to the future president. This exchange resulted in the two men making preparations to duel, although they never actually did so.
7. For most of his adult life, Jackson lived with two bullets in his body. In 1806 Jackson dueled Charles Dickinson. Dickinson died in the affair, but not before he shot Jackson in the chest. A few years later Jackson got in a brawl with brothers Thomas and Jesse Benton in Nashville's City Hotel. Jackson was shot twice and nearly bled to death.
8. It would be hard to overstate how amazed the world was at what General Jackson and his army achieved at the Battle of New Orleans. "In the waning days of the War of 1812, Andrew Jackson shocked the world by leading a ragtag force of local and state militia, regular U.S. troops, free men of color, Choctaw Indians, and Baratarian pirates to a crushing victory over an invading army of proud, tested, elite British soldiers determined to seize New Orleans," is the way a brochure for a Battle of New Orleans display at the Historic New Orleans Collection described it.
9. In 1824, the first time Jackson ran for president, he won the popular vote but didn't get enough electoral votes to win. The House of Representatives settled the matter and elected John Quincy Adams president. Jackson thus became the first of two Tennesseans to run for president and win the popular vote but lose the election. The second, of course, was Al Gore in 2000.
10. When Jackson was president, the state of South Carolina threatened to secede from the Union because people there were opposed to a tariff. Jackson was furious and made it clear that if South Carolina tried to secede, the U.S. government would wage war against it. "In forty days I can have within the limits of South Carolina fifty thousand men, and in forty days another fifty thousand," he wrote at the time.  
South Carolina backed down. But 28 years later the same state tried to leave the Union again. Another American president, Abraham Lincoln, reacted in much the way Jackson intended to. This time, however, South Carolina didn't back down, and the result was the Civil War.

For more on Andrew Jackson, I recommend reading *Andrew Jackson: His Life and Times* by H.W. Brands. Or, if you go to [www.tnhistoryforkids.org](http://www.tnhistoryforkids.org), there's a virtual tour of The Hermitage, Andrew Jackson's home. Just go to the main page, click on "Virtual Tours" and "The Hermitage." 

## Tennessee History for Kids

*Bill Carey is a Nashville author and executive director of Tennessee History for Kids, an online Tennessee history textbook. For more great stories of Tennessee history, go to [www.tnhistoryforkids.org](http://www.tnhistoryforkids.org).*